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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 11, 2011

LUPE WISSEL,
REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

The Honorable Robert Gates
Secretary of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Gates and Secretary Shinseki:

Last month, an announcement was made that both Departments would develop one joint Electronic Health Record (EHR). As Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, we strongly support the decision to create a lifelong joint EHR for veterans and members of the armed services. We stand ready to assist you in this endeavor.

We believe that a joint EHR, if successfully implemented, will improve the continuity of care for all servicemembers, especially Guard and Reserve members who receive care from multiple health care networks on a regular basis. We are hopeful that both of your Departments would potentially realize savings by reducing long-term costs to maintain two aging software systems. A modern EHR will allow continued development of cutting edge technologies, ultimately raising the quality of health care.

The announcement of a joint EHR adds clarity to the future of a lifetime record and the realization of a comprehensive transition system for newly minted veterans. We hope the Departments' "lessons learned" and collective knowledge of private industry standards, developed through the use of pilots, will prove useful throughout the evolution of a joint EHR. We strongly encourage the ongoing collaboration with the private sector. In addition, the President's Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record initiative, while slow to develop, has the potential to be a successful framework to solve the challenges associated with sharing electronic records. We ask that you provide our Committee staff with quarterly briefings on your progress starting immediately after the implementation meeting scheduled for May of 2011.

Thank you for your leadership and dedication to this effort and all who have worn the uniform of our nation.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
Chairman



Richard M. Burr
Ranking Member